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ABSTRACT

Efforts by Canada Natives to put their languages into standard written formats and to use Native languages with their children are discussed in this review of the Stoney Indian Language Project. The Stoney community is centered at Morley, Alberta (Canada), and the population of the three bands--Bear's Paw, Chiniki, and Goodstoney--is nearly 2,700. The tribe is a member of the Assiniboine branch of the Siouan language family. In 1965, the Stoney Tribal Council entered into an agreement with the Summer Institute of Linguistics to develop a writing system for the Stoney language, and a standard alphabet was devised following the Roman orthography tradition. The first stage of the Stone Language Project resulted in the preparation of six books for both adults and children, as well as a videotape version of one of them for use with third graders. Each of the Stoney legends in the booklets was told by an Elder and the accompanying illustrations are by Stoney artists. These activities and additional work on legends are described. Contains 15 references. (LB)

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The Stoney Indian Language Project

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The recent surge of interest in the teaching of heritage languages may be linked to a new understanding of and appreciation for Canada's multicultural policy, namely that cultural diversity is to be encouraged. As a result the ethnocultural communities -- other than English and French whose lifestyles and languages are protected by the Canadian Constitution -- have risen to the occasion and emphasized heritage language teaching as a means by which to encourage the perpetuation of traditional cultural lifestyles.

Classic ways to accomplish this goal have included 1) ecological separation, such as the Hutterites have always practiced; 2) endogamy, which implies that the selection of marriage partners be limited to the ranks of the ethnocultural group in question; 3) education, usually through the establishment of a parochial school system; 4) institutional completeness, implying that children are predominantly socialized through agencies managed by the respective ethnic group; and 5) language teaching (Anderson & Frideres, 1981; Backeland & Frideres, 1977; Breton, 1979). In addition, the factors of ingroup "opening" and "closing" must be considered, namely, the ways and means by which an ethnocultural group allows, limits or encourages integration with the dominant monoculture. For example, complete opening is not desirable because it leads to total assimilation and loss of identity. Good closing has to do with the maintenance of group boundaries and subsystems which help

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members reinforce strong ethnic values (Comeau & Driedger, 1978).

The situation of the Aboriginal peoples is in many ways quite different from that of either the Charter nations or Canada or the immigrant peoples. Historically, they possess the right of first occupancy. Geographically, they have occupied a different continent from that of the invaders who have manufactured the nation's multicultural policies. Culturally, they have maintained a unique stance of respecting the balance of nature with technological advance being assigned a subordinate or corollary status. In economic terms, they occupy the lower levels of income groups in Canada making it difficult for them to wield a significant power base. Legally, they are the object of special laws which identify them as a group and set them apart from the larger society (Berry, 1981).

Aboriginal peoples hold in common with other Canadians the concept that language and culture are inextricably bound together. However, the process of achieving or maintaining a functional level of language useage is complex. This is particularly true of cultures that have traditionally relied on oral tradition for there is no traditional "body of literature" to build on. This also makes any attempt to "get back to the basics" for language identification difficult, even though that procedure should be possible at any given point. Language is, after all, a living phenomenon. In Native cultures, where the role of Elders has been significant, it has also become necessary to identify parallel and supportive means by which to enhance language useage (Medicine, 1987).

Native languages have been rapidly changing over the last two decades. Where once the Native language was the vehicle by which to transmit Indian values and respect, it has at least been partially replaced by English. It is important to learn English in order to attain the language skills and concepts essential to surviving in the dominant monoculture. However, many Indian leaders believe that the traditional Indian culture can only survive if Native languages are perpetuated (Manitoba, 1985).

Background to the Stoney Project

The Stoney community is centered at Morley, Alberta. The population of the three bands, Bear's Paw, Chiniki, and Goodstoney, is nearly twenty-seven hundred. The tribe is a member of the Assiniboine branch of the Siouan language family, and its major sources of income are cattle ranching, lumber, tourism, and oil and gas leasing. A new K-12 grade school costing 6.6 million dollars was opened in the fall of 1985 with an enrollment of just over three hundred children.

In 1965, the Stoney Tribal Council entered into an agreement with the Summer Institute of Linguistics to develop a writing system for the Stoney language. After several experiments, a standard alphabet was devised following the Roman orthography tradition (Harbeck, 1973).

In December, 1968, the Stoney Band opted for self-government. The members of the three bands of the Stoney tribe gathered solemnly to select a fifteen member group of councilors and chiefs who would steer their people to self-government. They faced the challenge with mixed feelings except for unanimity in the realization that the Stonies must restore their shattered society to its once proud status (Snow, 1977). One of the means to accomplish this restoration was an oral history program started in 1970. Using tape recorders, program workers interviewed tribal Elders and collected hundreds of hours of information about Stoney history, philosophy, and moral teaching. In 1972 the program was reorganized as the Stoney Cultural Education Program (S.C.E.P.). It was planned, implemented, and operated under the direction of the Stoney Tribal Council and concentrated on people development, that is, to encourage Stoney youth to enhance their individual abilities (Harbeck, 1973). The materials produced by the program would replace harmful school curricula that omitted any reference to the Indian heritage. It would also help the Stoney children to learn history from an Indian point of view and assist in passing on the traditions of Stoney culture.

S.C.E.P. began with a surge of enthusiasm and publications, but after a few years the budget cuts familiar to all Native educators and leaders began. The present project

was initiated as a means of reviving aspects of S.C.E.P., and the first publications are new editions of those works.

Laying the ground-work

The initiation of new programs in any community involves community approval and some kind of needs assessment. The fact that the Stoney language is rapidly changing to incorporate many dominant monocultural concepts has been a concern for more than a decade. Even though the Stoney tribe has been successful in warding off many outside influences over the generations, it is not possible to maintain complete isolation. In fact, the Stoney people have faced a very severe challenge from outside influences, Morley particularly, since the reserve is so close to the City of Calgary.

The mandate of the original S.C.E.P. Program was carried over into the first phase of the new endeavor since an updating and reprinting of the earlier materials was the first goal. The project team has also kept in close contact with members of the Stoney Education Authority, a body which has responsibility for all educational activities on the reserve. In addition, an informal list of Elders has been made, and different Elders are sought out for information and advice with regard to identifying and recording Indian legends and practice. One working document, produced by an Elder, is titled, "How to Behave in Stoney Country," and it will be published as an accompanying guide to the new curriculum materials.

It is envisaged that the future stages of the current project may follow the plan devised by the Blackfoot people east of Calgary. Their program has included a formal community survey of needs, the development and utilization of a Blackfoot language proficiency test, the formulation of a three-level language curriculum program, and the start of a language teacher inservice course. Blackfoot educators have also concluded that language teacher qualifications do not necessarily imply the attainment of a university degree. Familiarity with the language is the basic criterion, and

respectable methodological procedures may be attained via inservicing.

The first stage of the Stoney Language Project has seen the preparation of six books (completed or ready for production) in both English and Stoney. The books include:

1. *Ceremonial Indian Costumes* (A Stoney Coloring Book).
2. *Little Bear Goes on Summer Holidays* (A light-hearted children's book about a cute bear who engages in a variety of Stoney outdoor activities).
3. *The Blind Man and the Loon* (A teaching legend with a lesson about the behavior of a hard-hearted wife towards her blind husband).
4. *The Trickster (iktomni) and the Bear* (A humorous story about a legendary supernatural creature in Stoney tradition).
5. *Origin of the Winter Season* (The story of winter's beginning).
6. *Sandhill Crane and Mr. Winter* (The day when the Sandhill Crane chased away Mr. Winter and brought spring).

The project team has also produced an eight minute videotape version of *The Blind Man and the Loon* which has been piloted in the local Morley Community School. The book of the same title has been used with the videotape in third grade. They were piloted by the late Darren Poucette, a Stoney teacher and a graduate of the University of Calgary. It is hoped that additional videotapes of other legends will be produced during the second stage of the project.

Each of the Stoney legends in the published booklets was told by an Elder, and the accompanying illustrations are by Stoney artists. As the project moves into its second stage, care is being taken to identify new or "rare" legends and to search for new artists. The initial publication of the legend books in a plastic, spiral-bound form was limited to a sufficient number for the pilot teaching project. Future editions in a more

permanent form are planned. Naturally, there will always be a few errors to correct in future editions.

As the end of the Twentieth Century nears, it becomes more and more obvious that our Globe is shrinking in size. This makes it more essential that cultural learnings be shared between peoples. The reasoning of the project team in this regard is to make Stoney materials available in both English and Stoney so that outsiders may learn about Stoney ways. Also, with the intensity of prejudice and discrimination that still lingers in Alberta, it is also felt that the availability of reliable information about the Stoney way of life can only serve to alleviate misunderstandings and promote understanding and acceptance.

Vicissitudes and learnings

The accumulation and publication of Indian legends is a rich learning experience, and this project has been no exception. In the first instance, there are a number of things to be learned about legends in Stoney culture. For example, there are two kinds of legends, those employed for the purpose of teaching moral or historical lessons and those told purely for amusement. The trickster or îktomnî stories are usually told for enjoyment. At present, the team is working on another Trickster story about a mouse pow-wow discovered by the Trickster as it is celebrated in the skull of a dead animal. It is really quite intriguing. The Blind Man and the Loon, on the other hand, is a teaching legend. It has a moral to the story. It deals with the relations between a husband and wife and their regard for each other. (It is interesting to note that most Indian tribes have a similar story).

While the team was producing the videotape for the legend, some concern arose about releasing an English language version. It was feared that the story might be misunderstood by non-Natives. After all, the legend contains what might be viewed as a violent scene where the woman's breasts are cut off as punishment for her cruelty to her blind husband. Would outsiders view this scene as standard behavior among the Stoneys? Was cruelty an acceptable form

of punishment? One way out of the dilemma is to remind ourselves that every culture has an element of cruelty in its folklore. Bible stories, Aesop's fables, and a host of fairy tales relate endless accounts of people being put to death with never a worry. With this consideration, the videotape was completed.

Another very sensitive matter that came to light during the project pertains to the ownership of legends. In Stoney tradition, any particular version of a legend belongs to the storyteller. Thus the editors of these legends regard their role as recorders and translators only. They have been careful not to change the intent or meaning of any of the legends. However, in the oral tradition, changes in the story-line were accepted and expected. In this project that time-honored tradition was avoided since the process here was to print, not to tell, legends. Added to this is the importance of recognizing that probing into the content of legends is a very sensitive activity. After all, the legends represent the arena of sacred teachings among the Stoneys. This fact requires that the various dimensions of the project be conducted with appropriate respect.

Another of the challenging features of this project had to do with the nature of the language itself In the Stoney community, expressions and syllabic emphases vary from one band to another, and even from one family to another. Because of this the translators sometimes found it necessary to "talk out" an apparent difference with a view to settling for one of the available options of writing a particular word or expression. Thus the process of "cooperative compromise" was much adhered to by project team members.

In conclusion, the challenge and privilege of working in the language domain offers many advantages. Not the least of these are a greater familiarity with those who know the language best (Elders) and the gleaning of insights into Stoney culture. It may be presumptuous at this point, but it is possible that this project may also assist the goal of preserving and enhancing the Stoney way of life. That possibility adds a special dimension of importance to the undertaking.

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